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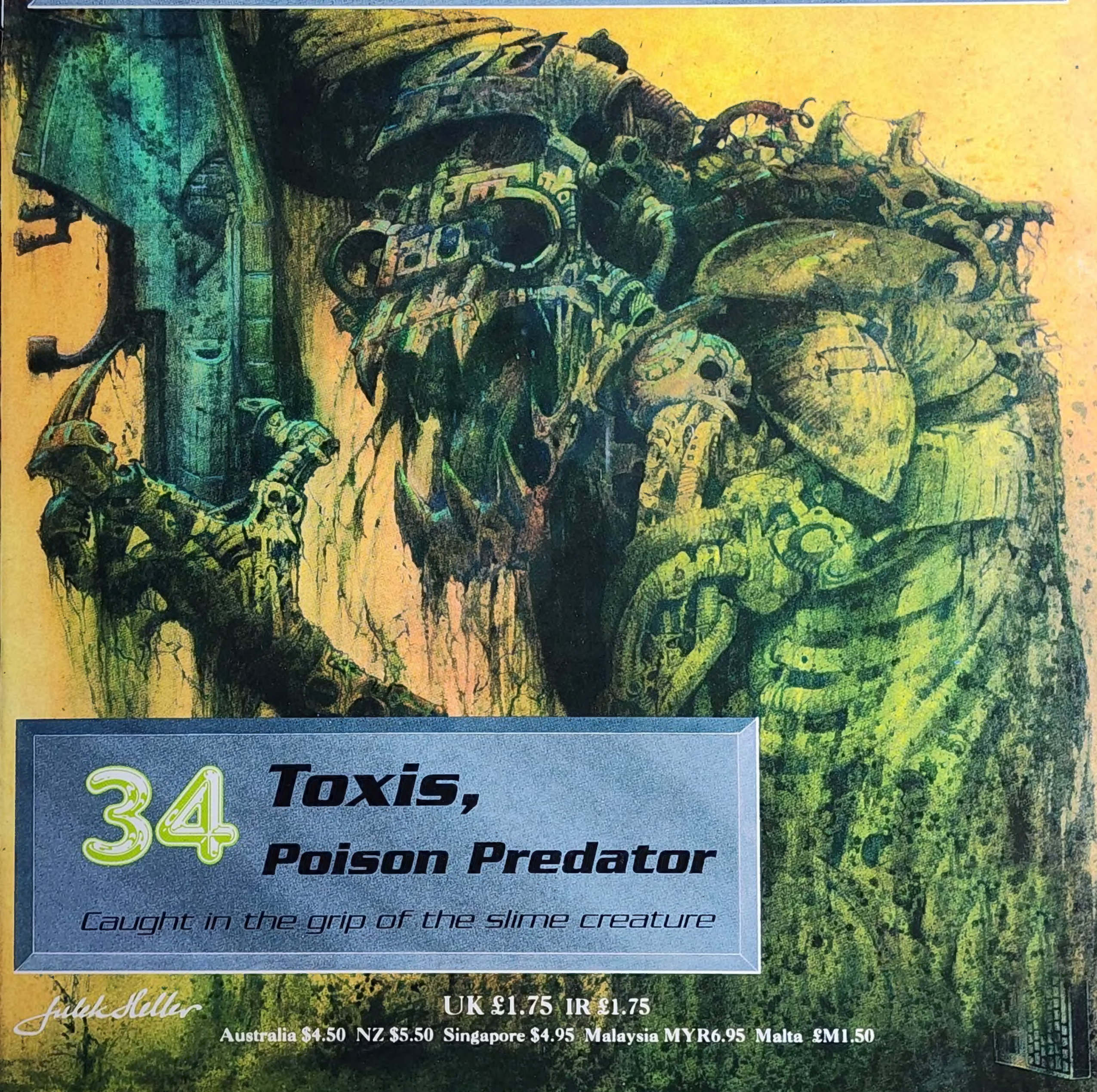
The Ancestral Trail

CYBER CHALLENGE IN THE NEXT DIMENSION



34 Toxis, Poison Predator

Caught in the grip of the slime creature

Jack Keller

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In the thirty-fourth sector

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Computer graphics produced by Mehau Kulyk

A wave of nausea swept over Richard as he slowly opened his eyes. For a moment, he did not know where he was. Then it all came back to him. He remembered his adventures in the Ancestral World: the strange creatures he had encountered on his travels; the final battle with the vile forces of the Evil One. He groaned as he recalled his arrival in the Cyber Dimension. Then a familiar whirring noise in the background caught his attention.

"Scanning Chosen One for damage," said a voice that Richard instantly recognized. "Damage negligible."

Collapse

"Robo – what happened?" Richard whispered weakly.

"Chosen One interacted with Omni piece. Dangerous. Carbon-based organisms must not touch Omni pieces."

There was a grinding of gears and a small compartment slid out from the robot's torso. "Robo will carry Omni piece," he said, picking up the small triangle from where it lay on the ground and depositing it in the compartment.

Richard's face lit up in surprise. "Is there no end to your talents?" he asked, as the compartment slid shut.

"Must return to cyber cruiser," Robo said.

"What's the hurry?" Richard asked.

"Without the Keeper, citadel's structure will collapse."

Richard turned his head and surveyed the melted remains of the giant computer. "When?" he enquired.

"Immediately," came the reply.

With Robo hot on his heels, Richard fled the citadel. As he ran, he could hear the groan of tortured metal and the crash of falling mortar as the building collapsed.

A sound from above caught Richard's attention. He looked up to see the cyber cruiser gliding towards him in response to a low-frequency signal from Robo.

Richard climbed aboard the flying machine and took to the skies. Behind him, a cloud of dust rose in the air as the Keeper's citadel crumbled.

"Which way?" Richard shouted.

"Follow path of toxic river," Robo said.

Scent of decay

Richard skilfully guided the cyber cruiser through the intricate web of pipes that surrounded the toxic river. As he headed away from the dangers of Pipe City, Richard noticed that the river began to widen. From his airborne vantage point, he could also see that the river seemed to be full of debris. Giant pieces of misshapen rusting metal shared their liquid resting place with all manner of weird cyber waste. The river was obviously a dumping place for any unwanted objects or toxic residue that the Cyber Dimension chose to spew forth.

A gust of fetid cyber air interrupted Richard's thoughts.

"What's that smell?" he demanded, screwing up his face in disgust.

Behind him, Robo's sensors whirred into action. Then there was silence.

"Robo!" Richard said, choking over the increasing stench. "What's wrong?"

The robot's reply came in a voice that was noticeably weaker than Richard had become accustomed to hearing. Richard thought he could almost detect a faint sign of emotion in Robo's flat monotone.

"Odour too strong for sensors to analyse. Closing down sensors..."

As they followed the course of the toxic river, the awful smell got even worse. Then Richard noticed something that temporarily took his mind off it. In the distance he could see a city, the like of

which he had never encountered before.

It lay on the horizon like a dirty thumb-print. As they flew closer, Richard could see that the ground which surrounded the city was blackened and charred. The fossilized remains of what must once have been majestic trees lined scorched and crumbling avenues where rows of ancient buildings stood deserted.

Dead city

Behind the city could be seen the remains of a huge tower which reached into the skies as if desperate to escape the aura of decay that hung about its foundations.

Some unimaginable catastrophe had devastated the city and left it a mummified relic, a decaying stain on the forbidding cyber plains.

Richard called to Robo. "What has done this?" he asked wonderingly.

The robot's internal circuits slowly began to process information. "Unable to compute," was Robo's familiar response. "Insufficient data available."

As he spoke, something moved below the cyber cruiser. The glutinous fluid of the toxic river began to heave. Bubbles of yellow gas rose to its green surface and the dreadful smell grew even stronger.

Richard watched as a shape began to form in the waters. Slowly, a head appeared. Followed by misshapen shoulders and a massive torso, it pulled itself up from the toxic river and glared at the cyber cruiser.

A deafening roar filled the air.

"Who dares defy Toxis?" said a voice that beat like thunder on Richard's ears.

From the murky depths, a huge fist appeared. Lazily, it uncurled its fingers. Like a child snatching a toy, Toxis grabbed the cyber cruiser as it attempted to fly past.

"Toxis, poison predator," announced Robo from his perch behind Richard. "Toxic waste composition. Traces of organic acids."

Richard found himself staring into the eyes of the huge creature. It carefully scrutinized him, then spoke.

"Aaarrrghh!" Toxis growled. "Such cleanliness! Such purity! Such spotlessness! You disgust me!"

The beast stretched out its arm so that the cyber cruiser was held as far away from its face as possible.

"What manner of sterile creature are you?" it demanded.

Before Richard could answer, the sound of motors could be heard whirring into action behind him.

"Carbon-based organism. Bipedal. Earth origin. Known as Chosen One," said a monotone voice.

"Thanks, Robo!" Richard said, glaring at his companion.

THE TASK

A light of recognition dawned in the creature's eyes. The evil look on its face melted away, to be replaced by a sickly, sweet smile.

"Chosen One, eh?" Toxis said. "How splendid it is to make your acquaintance."

"What do you want of me!" Richard asked, shakily.

"Want of you?" Toxis said. "What could a poor, humble soul like me want of the great Chosen One? The very thought!" Toxis moved to release the cyber cruiser.

"Well, come to think of it," he said suddenly, his grip on the flying machine tightening again. "Perhaps there is one tiny little thing that you could do for me..."

"Which is?" Richard responded.

"See that tower in the distance?" Toxis replied. "How would you like to do a little sight-seeing?"

There was a gushing sound and once more the toxic river began to churn. Richard watched as the waters divided, flowing into two trembling walls of toxic waste. Between these, Toxis placed the cyber cruiser. Richard gasped. The smell of the waste was overpowering.

"Whatever it is you want – I'll do it!" Richard yelled.

Toxis' smile broadened. "Such a nice young man," it said.

"Lift us out of the river and we'll be on our way."

Without warning, tears began to form in the creature's eyes. "You're not the first to take advantage of poor me," it sobbed.

"What do you mean?" Richard asked.

"There have been others who have promised to help me – and always I've been let down and betrayed."

"I won't betray you," Richard said. "Just tell me what to do."

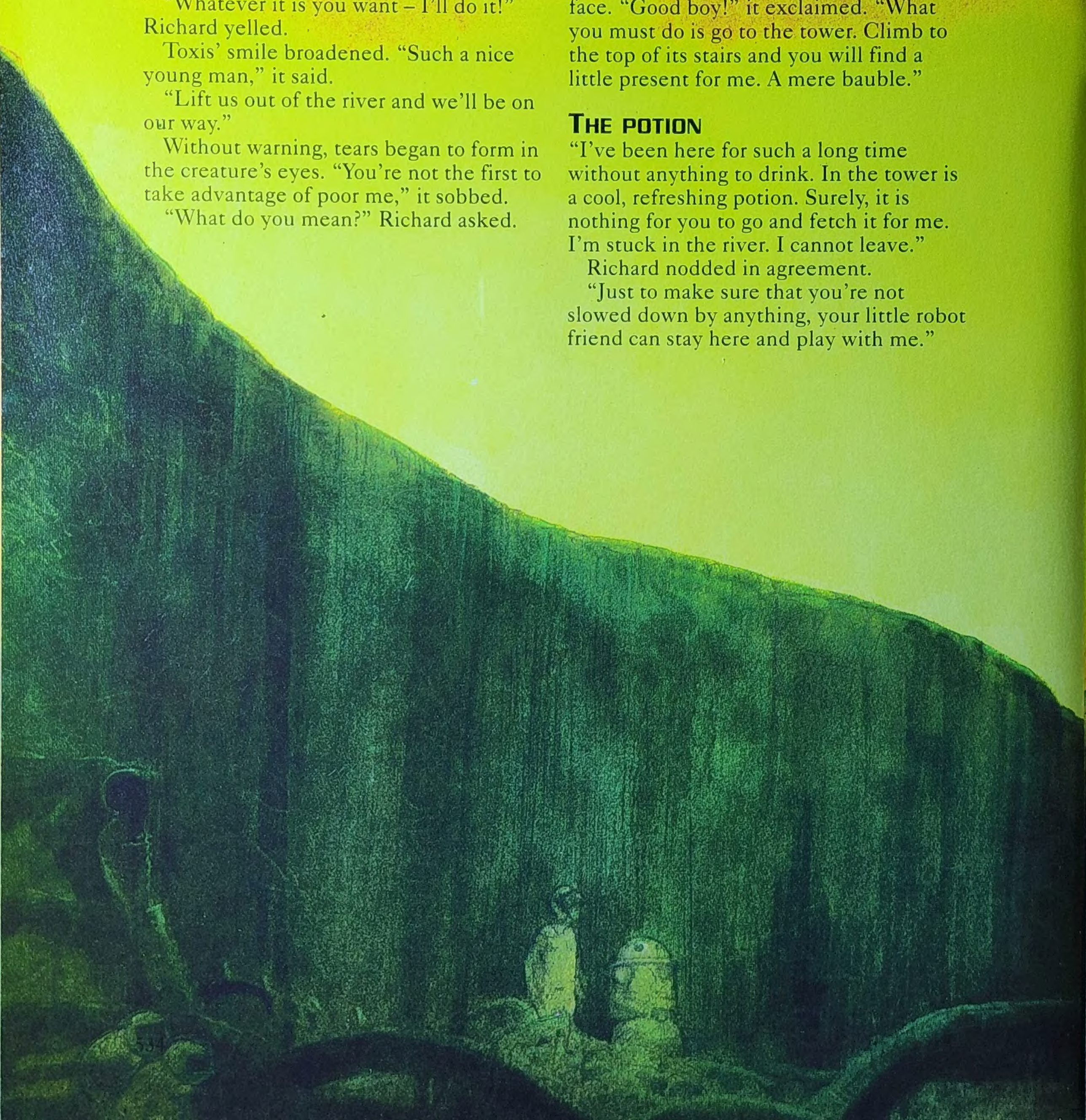
Toxis' tears instantly dried up. Once more, a huge grin could be seen on its face. "Good boy!" it exclaimed. "What you must do is go to the tower. Climb to the top of its stairs and you will find a little present for me. A mere bauble."

THE POTION

"I've been here for such a long time without anything to drink. In the tower is a cool, refreshing potion. Surely, it is nothing for you to go and fetch it for me. I'm stuck in the river. I cannot leave."

Richard nodded in agreement.

"Just to make sure that you're not slowed down by anything, your little robot friend can stay here and play with me."



Toxis lifted Richard on to dry land. As he did so, Richard stole a glance at Robo's binary panel and saw that a new message had appeared. He decoded it but could find no use for its cryptic meaning.

"Don't be long now, Chosen One," grinned Toxis.

Richard set off briskly for the tower. As he walked, he noticed that the scorched landscape was dotted with pools of liquid. They reminded Richard of the alkali pools that had saved them from the terrible, acid-squirting Hydronomizers.

The lost tower

It was not long before Richard reached the tower. At the base, was a small arched doorway. Drawing his sword, Richard poked it tentatively into the dark opening, hoping that if anything was inside it would reveal itself. Just above the threshold, he felt the sword cut through something which felt like a rope.

From deep within the tower came the rumble of ancient, unoiled wheels turning. With an ear-wrenching squeal, a giant blade sliced across the doorway at neck height and vanished into a narrow slit on the other side.

Without giving himself time to think, Richard launched himself through the entrance and up the spiral stairs, his pounding feet echoing inside the stairwell.

At last Richard burst through on to the roof of the tower. It was an eerie place.

Richard found himself on a small, flat platform with no parapet. Far below him, the ground was spinning, but there was no sign of any potion.

Carefully, he lay flat, wriggled to the edge and looked over. Set into the side of the tower underneath the overhang was a small alcove. In it stood a small phial of ruby glass, protected by the familiar pulsating glow of a force field. Flanking the alcove was a pair of hideous gargoyles.

His eyes drawn by the glass phial, Richard did not spare the gargoyles a glance. Experimentally, he drew his sword and stabbed at the force field. The blade rebounded in a shower of sparks with exactly the same force as he had applied.

Richard paused to consider the situation. The gargoyles' outlines seemed to come into sharper focus, but Richard was too intent on his prize to notice. He remembered the binary message. "Perhaps if I try it very gently..." he thought to himself.

The Gargoyles

Delicately, Richard slid his hand down the side of the tower. The force field felt like thin rubber, just resisting his fingertips. The touch felt like cold burning fire, but he gritted his teeth and slowly pressed his fingers through. With infinite care, he grasped the phial and drew it gently through the edge of the force field.

Scooping up the precious phial of liquid,

Richard turned back to the stairs. He ran down them as fast as he could, cradling the fragile vessel in his cupped hands.

A creaking noise above him made him run even faster. From inside the tower he was unable to see what was happening.

Outside, the gargoyles were moving. They had pulled their clawed wings free from the parapet. Shaking their inhuman heads from side to side, they swooped down from their perches.

With a confused hubbub of angry chattering and a rattle of claws, barbed tails and bony wings, the guardians of the tower gave chase.

Passing the phial into one hand, Richard used the other to balance himself against the wall and ran down the spiralling steps.

When he reached the bottom of the tower, Richard ducked out through the doorway without breaking stride. In cupped hands, he held the phial in front of him as he charged towards the toxic river.

Behind him the four gargoyles screamed through the air, shrieking with demonic rage against the thief of their treasure.

Richard sprinted as fast as he could but the creatures were gaining on him. It would not be long before they were upon him. Whatever was inside the phial he was holding had to be something very special.

At the edge of the riverbank, Richard could make out the ugly form of Toxis. The creature was watching the chase intently, fidgeting with anticipation.

"Run, Chosen One, run," Toxis shouted. Gasping for breath, Richard made a last effort to reach the banks of the toxic river. Screeching with fury, the hideous gargoyles readied their poisoned stings for the final attack.

Unexpected rescue

Richard threw himself flat to the ground just as the leading gargoyle dived. He felt the poisoned barb scrape against his helmet. Scampering frantically on his stomach, he gained shelter under a piece of twisted wreckage.

Then a mighty roar rent the air. He looked up in amazement to see Toxis attacking his horrific pursuers with handfuls of slimy green toxic waste.

Richard looked thoughtfully at the phial and an idea took shape in his mind.

The uneven battle was brief. In no time at all the gargoyles lay immobile on the ground, encased in stinking, toxic jelly.

"Chosen One!" roared Toxis, drooling with excitement. "How nice to see you!"

He clasped his hands over his head and let out a victory yell. Then he turned to Richard, his eyes glittering with feverish anticipation. "If you don't mind, I'd like my present now."

"Free Robo and the cyber cruiser first," demanded Richard.

Toxis looked genuinely hurt by his words. "Your friend is free to go any time he likes. How can you be so distrustful?"

In moments, Robo was perched atop the cruiser and gliding towards Richard.

"Now give me the potion, fair's fair."

Without a word, Richard threw the phial towards the foul-smelling creature.

Toxis seized the small glass container. Richard watched as he tugged out the stopper and greedily tipped the contents of the phial into its gaping mouth.

Immediately, a new sound pierced the air. Toxis was laughing.

"Poor little Chosen One. How very amusing it is that you of all people have freed me from the toxic river. My master, the Evil One, will be pleased."

"I thought as much," Richard said.

Toxis looked puzzled for a moment. Then he howled with laughter.

"That makes it all the better. To think you have given up your quest for the sake of a worthless lump of tin," he jeered, scornfully flicking a piece of toxic waste at the watching Robo.

Richard brandished his sword angrily.

"My, my, Chosen One. We do have a temper, don't we?"

"You don't frighten me!" Richard said.

"Chosen One – I even frighten myself," was the gloating reply. "The potion that you found for me is my release. Now I can leave my toxic prison. Now I can roam the cyber dimension and purge it of the awful cleanliness that abounds and repulses my soul. Now is my time! "

The monster slowly began to pull itself out of the toxic river.

"Priority!" said the shrill voice of Robo. "Suggest immediate evacuation of area!"

Richard did not move. He boldly stood his ground to outface the monster.

THE GREAT DECEPTION

"Robo, exactly what do these contain?" Richard said calmly, pointing at the many pools of liquid that he had noticed earlier on the landscape."

Robo's sensors buzzed. "Sodium solution," he replied. "Component of substance commonly known as..."

"...Soap!" an enraged Toxis completed the diagnosis. "You have tricked me. You have done the unthinkable! You have turned my body into soap!"

It was Richard's turn to smile. "Didn't your mother tell you always to read the label on the bottle before drinking?"

While Toxis had been distracted by the gargoyles, Richard had poured away the potion and replaced it with liquid from one of the pools. Instead of something that would liberate him from the toxic pool, the grinning creature had actually been drinking a cleansing solution.

The sodium was already reacting with the toxic fluids holding the monster together. As the chemical reaction intensified, Toxis' body began to swirl.

"Noooo! Noooo!" screamed the poison predator, vainly splashing more fluids from the river over itself. It was too late. Slow and weak at first, the movement gathered strength and speed until the fearsome creature was transformed into a vast, spinning whirlpool of toxic waste.

Sucked away

The centre of the vortex began to rise into the air. It stretched into a huge inverted hurricane and Richard threw himself flat as the wind began to roar around him. "Look out Robo!" he shouted. "It's sucking the air into a typhoon!"

The robot's answer was lost in the shrieking winds. The air filled with sound and fury as the rotting contents of the toxic river were sucked up from their bed to vanish through the sky like water into a giant plughole.

Spread flat on the ground and clinging desperately to one of Robo's mechanical arms, Richard felt the winds pluck irresistibly at his prone body.

The sturdy little robot had locked his other arm on to the cyber cruiser but it was no good. Slowly but surely, they were being pulled along the ground.

Suddenly, other forces came into play. Richard realized that, instead of being dragged skywards with the vanishing river, they were unexpectedly being pulled away from the centre of the enormous whirlpool.

WORM HOLE

"How did you manage that, Robo?" Richard shouted above the din.

"Robo's involvement in new situation negative," replied the robot. "Opposing forces caused by recent emergence of worm hole in immediate vicinity."

"Recent emergence of what?"

"Worm hole is common name for inter-dimensional gateway. Composed of black hole and white hole."

"Robo," called Richard, finally losing patience with his pedantic friend, "This is no time to get technical! Do something!"

"Impossible to counter gravitational pull of worm hole."

Richard looked ahead and saw a rapidly expanding dark hole appear beside one of the sodium pools.

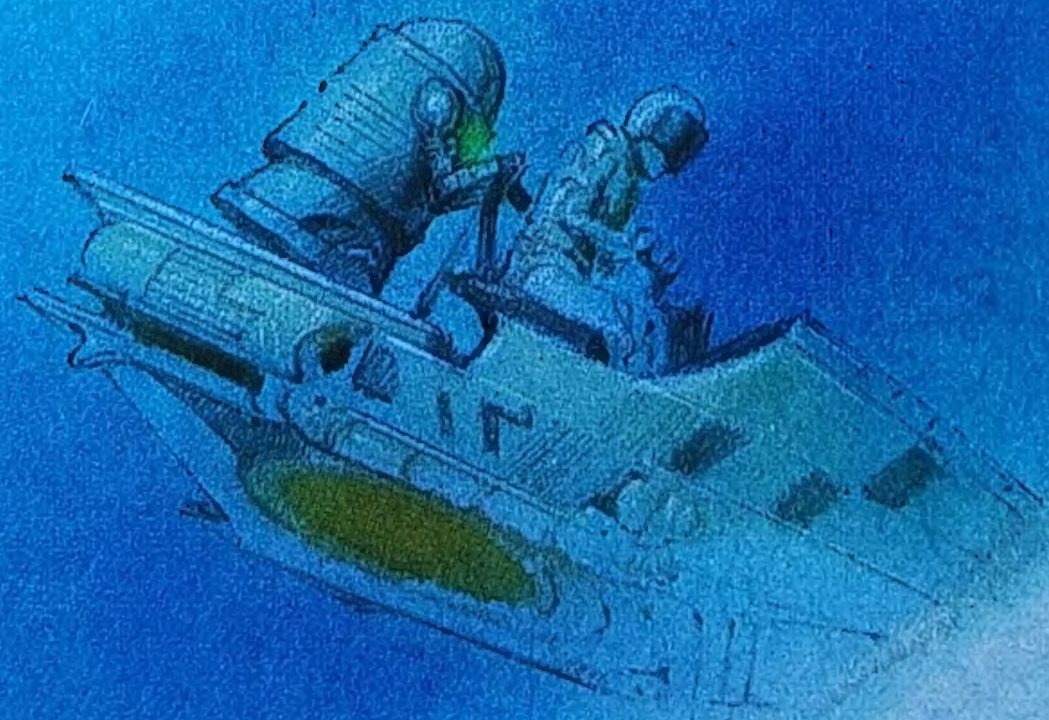
"Oh no!" he cried. "That's the place where I emptied the phial of the potion. It must have made the worm hole!"

TIMELESS JOURNEY

Within moments the worm hole had grown to gigantic proportions. There was no way that Richard and Robo could resist its implacable pull.

There was a flash of blinding light and suddenly the noise of the toxic whirlpool ceased. Still clinging to the cyber cruiser, Richard looked about him.

Unseen forces pulled the pair through a vortex of nothingness. Richard tried to speak but no sound could be heard. With incredible speed they shot into the centre of the worm hole; a place where time and distance had no meaning. Richard closed his eyes and hung on tightly.



SHOOMI'S SANCTUARY

Enter into the Cyber Dimension and engage optical recognition to find...

▶ Shoomi and Shoobi

Richard's inquisitive little followers are still hot on the heels of Richard and Robo. Study the illustrations in this issue and and see if you can spot them.

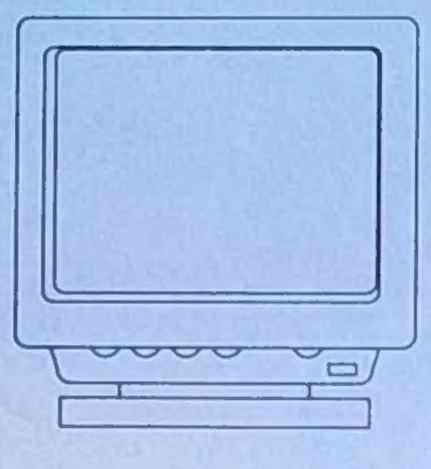
In issue 33 Shoomi and Shoobi were on page 516.

▶ Computer Challenge

Another vitally important computer component from the sinister *Cyber Dimension* has been hidden in this issue. Help Richard and Robo locate it in less than three minutes.

When you have discovered the component's hiding place, can you guess what it is and what its function might be?

In the last issue, a computer monitor was hidden at the base of the platform on page 516. Monitors resemble TV screens and are an essential part of any computer. Without a computer monitor, users would be unable to operate computer programmes.



▶ Cyber Chess

This issue contains your first pieces for *Cyber Chess*. In later issues you will receive the three remaining game board segments. These will be followed by a special instruction booklet explaining all the rules to *Mainframe Control* and *Cyber Chess*.

▶ Competition Details

In each issue you will find letter blocks. Cut these out and keep them safe. When you have collected 26, you will be given a clue which will help you form them into a sentence that reveals the fatal flaw in the Cyber Dimension. Competition details will appear in later issues.

NB The competition will be open to residents of UK and Eire only.

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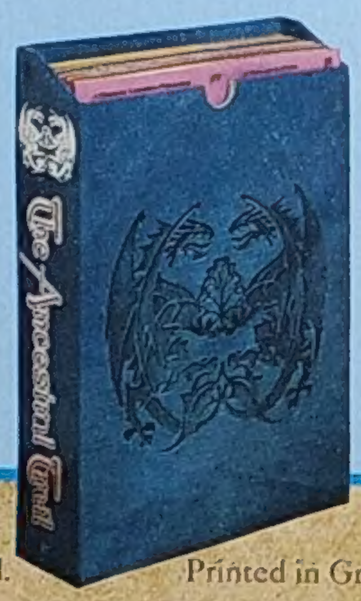

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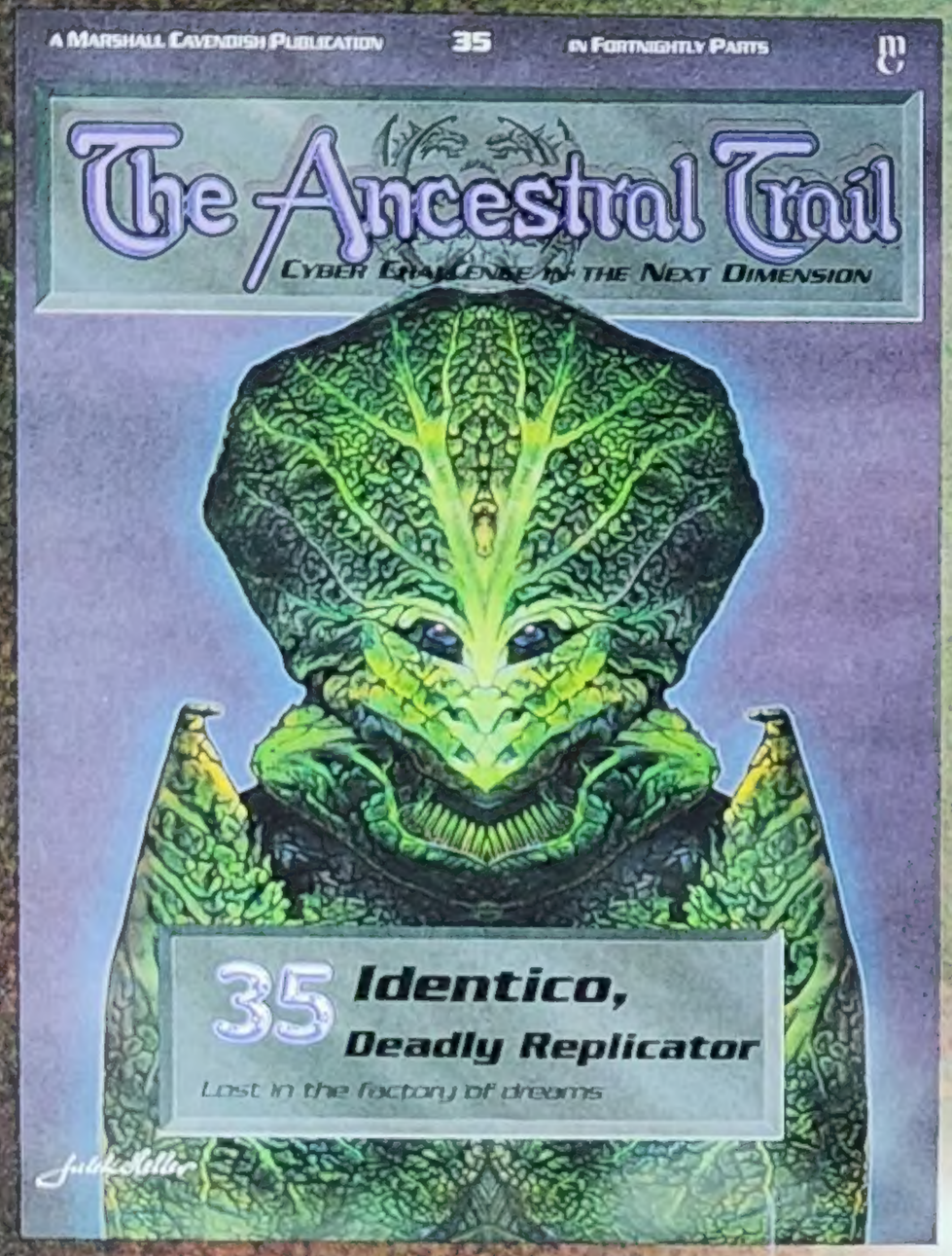

In Issue 35

Identico,

Deadly Replicator

Fantasy turns to fear as Richard and Robo enter a world that exists inside a bubble. To continue their quest they must face the evil Identico and his replitype hordes.

plus

- Two more **Techscan** cards
- More **Cyber Power** cards.
- More playing pieces for the **Cyber Chess** game.

Coming in Issue 36

Scoredef, Sinister Supervirus

Richard's adventures continue as he challenges the evil beauty of a sinister computer virus that roams the very heart of the cyber dimension.

plus

- The second section of your games board for **Mainframe Control** and **Cyber Chess**

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